

The Gurdies Bobucks: how are they faring?

Readers of *The Victorian Naturalist* may recall that a previously unrecorded population of Bobucks *Trichosurus caninus* was reported from The Gurdies Flora and Fauna Reserve on Westernport Bay (Hynes and Clelland 2005). In October and November 2005 a brief follow-up survey was carried out in The Gurdies and further south along the banks of the Bass River. Again, infrared-sensitive automatic cameras were used.

Although this second survey was far from exhaustive, it is now apparent that the Bobucks of The Gurdies are by no means confined to the Reserve itself. The cameras detected Bobucks at night on the ground in a creek bed approximately 100 m upstream from its confluence with the Bass River. Moreover, juvenile animals were photographed in the care of the female parent at both the Bass River site and within The Gurdies Reserve.

The fact that young are being detected indicates that the population is resident and not itinerant and that it is at least stable. Perhaps it is even expanding. It thus appears that Parks Victoria, the management organisation responsible for The Gurdies Flora and Fauna Reserve, succeeded in preserving a refuge for a reproductively viable subset of this unusual remnant Bobuck population.

Over a period of several months prior to October cameras were placed at various locations within the Reserve, but well away from the original 'Bobuck Creek' site. Animals such as Common Brushtail Possums, antechinus, rodents, wallabies, stray dogs and snakes were photographed. But no Bobucks.

While no systematic study of the animals' distribution within the study area has been attempted so far, it appears that Bobucks in this part of Gippsland may live only in close proximity to natural water-

courses. The availability of thick ground cover in and around such watercourses seems to be a critical part of the animals' habitat. Sparse ground cover appears to mean no Bobucks, even where apparently suitable trees are present.

The Bass River site divulged a very numerous native fauna. Over a mere three night 'stake out' in November, wallabies, Common Brushtail Possums, wombats, rodents and eechidnas were photographed as well as Bobucks. The author believes such rich diversity of native wildlife is entirely due to the presence of extensive stands of vegetation along parts of the Bass River and in declared parks such as The Gurdies Flora and Fauna Reserve.

For this the community at large perhaps owes a debt of gratitude to Trust For Nature who covenanted part of the only stretch of remnant riparian vegetation on the Bass River, thus permanently protect-



Fig. 1. Baby Bobuck at Gurdies

ing a unique habitat for these Bobucks and other native creatures.

Additional images of animals so far recorded in this survey may be viewed at the following website: http://www.thylacoleo.com/news/oct_dec2005/oct_dec2005.html

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References

Hynes D and Cleeland M (2005) Presence of Bobucks (*Trichosurus caninus*) in The Gurdies on Westernport Bay, Victoria. *The Victorian Naturalist* **122**, 141-145.

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Wildlife of the Box-Ironbark Country

by Chris Tzaros

Publisher: *CSIRO Publishing, 2005. 256 pages, paperback and CD; colour photographs. ISBN 0643069674. RRP \$39.95*

Local and regional natural history and field guides are a useful starting point for learning about an area that is new, especially when written by someone such as Chris Tzaros, with a deep knowledge and love for the region being described. The author writes in the preface to *Wildlife of the Box-Ironbark Country*, 'I hope that this book will be used by many people, not only workers or students in the field of land and wildlife management, community extension or regional planning, but also landholders, naturalists, tourists, and anyone who may simply wish to learn more about the wildlife of Victoria's wonderful box-ironbark country'. I think he has succeeded; there is something in this book for everyone. This book would be especially useful for newcomers to the Box-Ironbark, such as landholders and research students who are unfamiliar with the region.

Over the past 200 years, Victoria's Box-Ironbark forests and woodlands have been so heavily cleared and modified for timber, mining and farming that now only about 15% remains, mostly in isolated remnants or as corridors along roadsides. Although there are some larger remnants, such as Warby Range State Park (11 084 ha), most

of the remaining Box-Ironbark remnants are tiny, degraded fragments. Take a look at the maps of the 16 Box-Ironbark parks and conservation areas in this book and you will see that many, although seemingly large, are really only smaller areas cobbled together, many with long, ragged edges. It is sobering to note that there is only one very small patch of Box-Ironbark remaining that matches the official criterion of undisturbed and uncut 'old-growth' woodland.

What is left of the Box-Ironbark forests and woodlands provides critical habitat for a large number of woodland plants and animals, now threatened because of destruction of their habitat. Many species, such as the Regent Honeyeater, Swift Parrot, Squirrel Glider and Brush-tailed Phascogale, are dependent on the remnants that remain.

The first three chapters provide an excellent summary of the Box-Ironbark region, its history and its wildlife. The natural distribution of Box-Ironbark species, why the region has such a diversity of species and how they have been affected by the habitat destruction and modification of the past 200 years are covered. A succinct summary points out how current land-uses and